Know Your Spices

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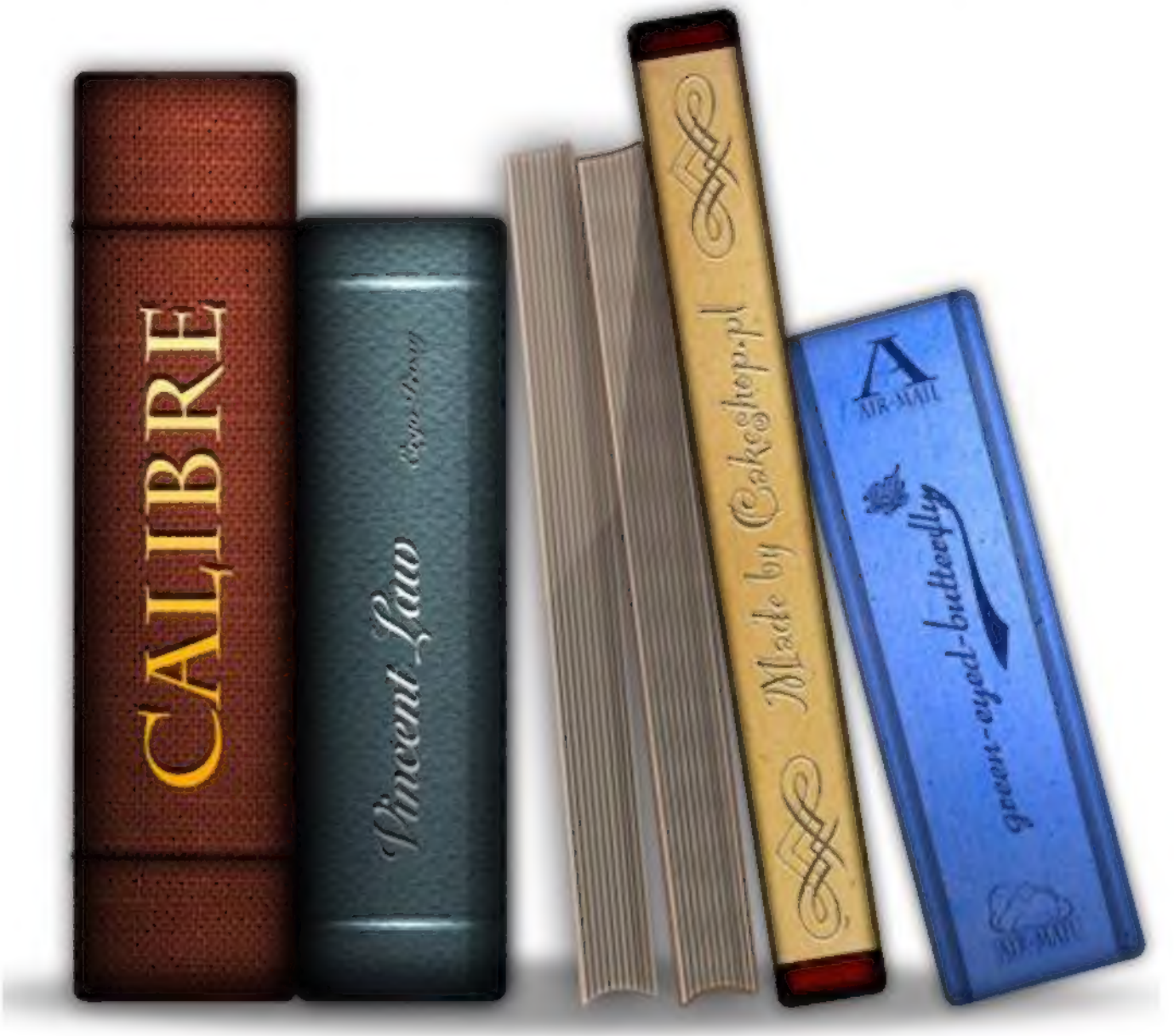
Book CCXV of Cookery



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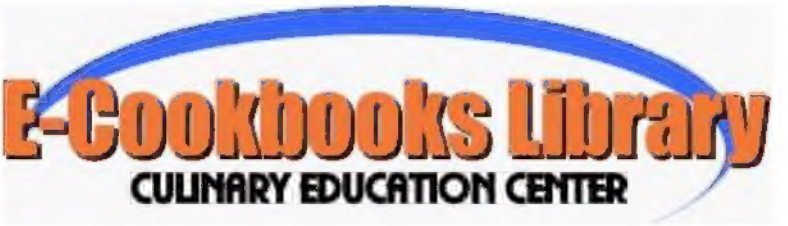

Know Your Spices

VJJE Publishing Co.

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Introduction

Know Your Spices

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Introduction

1

Personalized Cooking Aprons

a great gift idea for anyone ... including yourself!

We'll inscribe two lines of YOUR text in a variety of colors YOU choose. You can be like a professional chef with a name and title! Create a personalized cooking apron for yourself or as a great gift idea for anyone that cooks.

Or, choose from over thirty professionally designed styles of aprons with colorful themes.

Click HERE For Cooking Aprons!

Personalized Cooking Aprons

2

Allspice

The pea−size berry of the evergreen pimiento tree, native to the West Indies and South America, though Jamaica provides most of the world's supply (allspice is also known as Jamaica pepper). The dried berries are dark brown and can be purchased whole or ground. The spice is so named because it tastes like a combination of cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves. As with other spices, it should be stored in a cool, dark place for no more than 6

months. Allspice is used in both savory and sweet cooking.

Allspice

3

Anise

Known as far back as at least 1500 b.c., this small annual plant is a member of the parsley family. Both the leaves and

seed have a distinctive, sweet licorice flavor. The greenish brown, comma−shaped anise seed perfumes and flavors a variety of confections as well as savory dishes.

It's also used to flavor drinks such as Pastis, Arrack, Anisette and Ouzo. Anise seed plays an important role in the cooking of Southeast Asia. Chinese cooks are more likely to use Star Anise than anise seed.

Anise

4

Basil

If a person loves herbs, they love basil. It seems to be everyone's favorite herb and the recipes that take advantage of this fresh and spicy leaf are endless.

I personally think if you can only grow two plants it should be a pot of tomatoes and a pot of basil. With these two plants and a few basic pantry items you can treat yourself to gourmet fare!

Growing Basil

Basil is an annual, and is easily grown from seed. There are over two dozen types of basil including lettuce−leaf which has large leaves, cinnamon basil and the purple leafed varieties. Basil is not frost tolerant at all, so be sure to only plant after the soil has warmed completely.

Though it needs full sun, basil does need more moisture than some herbs, so keep it watered; especially in pots.

You can bring basil inside as a window herb if you plant the seeds in pots during warm weather and bring inside to grow

in a bright and sunny window when cold.

Using and Preserving Basil

Basil can be frozen, dried, or preserved in oil and it's delicious however you choose to preserve it.

Basil is also available year round in most produce sections. Add leaves to salads or sandwiches along with your lettuce. Add basil to sautés or soups at the last minute to preserve flavor.

Basil is also wonderful in herbal vinegars. Try mixing it with oregano and thyme.

Basil

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Bay Leaf

Also called laurel leaf or bay laurel, this aromatic herb comes from the evergreen bay laurel tree, native to the Mediterranean. Early Greeks and Romans attributed magical properties to the laurel leaf and it has long been a symbol of honor, celebration and triumph, as in "winning your laurels." The two main varieties of bay leaf are Turkish (which has 1− to 2−inch−long oval leaves) and Californian (with narrow, 2− to 3−inch−long leaves). The Turkish bay leaves have a more subtle flavor than do the California variety. Bay leaves are used to flavor soups, stews, vegetables and meats. They're generally removed before serving. Overuse of this herb can make a dish bitter. Fresh bay leaves are seldom available in markets.

Dried bay leaves, which have a fraction of the flavor of fresh, can be found in supermarkets. Store dried bay leaves

airtight in a cool, dark place for up to 6 months.

Bay Leaf

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Caraway Seed

These aromatic seeds come from an herb in the parsley family. They have a nutty, delicate anise flavor and are widely used in German, Austrian and Hungarian cuisine.

Caraway seeds flavor many foods including cheese, breads, cakes, stews, meats, vegetables and the liqueur Kummel. They should be stored airtight in a cool, dark place for no more than 6 months.

Caraway Seed

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Cardamom

A member of the ginger family, this aromatic spice is native to India and grows in many other tropical areas including Asia, South America and the Pacific Islands.

Cardamom seeds are encapsulated in small pods about the size of a cranberry. Each pod contains 17 to 20 tiny seeds. Cardamom has a pungent aroma and a warm,

spicy−sweet flavor. It's widely used in Scandinavian and East Indian cooking. Cardamom can be purchased either in the pod or ground. The latter, though more

convenient, is not as full−flavored because cardamom seeds begin to lose their essential oils as soon as they're ground. The seeds may be removed from the pods and

ground, or the entire pod may be ground. A mortar and pestle make quick work of the grinding. If using cardamom to flavor dishes such as stews and curries, lightly crush the shell of the pod and add the pod and seeds to the mixture. The shell will disintegrate while the dish cooks. Be frugal when using cardamom — a little goes a long way.

Cardamom

8

Cinnamon

Once used in love potions and to perfume wealthy Romans, this age−old spice comes in two varieties —

Cinnamomum zeylanicum (Ceylon cinnamon) and

Cinnamomum cassia (cassia). Cinnamon is the inner bark of a tropical evergreen tree. The bark is harvested during the rainy season when it's more pliable. When dried, it curls into long quills, which are either cut into lengths and sold as cinnamon sticks, or ground into powder. Ceylon(or tree) cinnamon is buff−colored and mildly sweet in flavor; cassia cinnamon is a dark, reddish brown color and has a more pungent, slightly bittersweet flavor. Cassia cinnamon is used and sold simply as

"cinnamon" in many countries (including the United States). Cinnamon is widely used in sweet dishes, but also makes an intriguing addition to savory dishes such as stews and curries. Oil of cinnamon comes from the pods of the cinnamon tree and is used as a flavoring, as well as a medicinal.

Cinnamon

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Clove

Considered one of the world's most important spices, cloves are the dried, unopened flower bud of the tropical evergreen clove tree. Reddish brown and nail−shaped, their name comes from clavus , the Latin word for nail.

Cloves are sold whole or ground and can be used to flavor a multitude of dishes ranging from sweet to savory.

Clove

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Coriander

Native to the Mediterranean and the Orient, coriander is related to the parsley family. It's known for both its seeds (actually the dried, ripe fruit of the plant) and for its dark green, lacy leaves. The flavors of the seeds and leaves bear absolutely no resemblance to each other. Mention of coriander seeds was found in early Sanskrit writings and the seeds themselves have been discovered in Egyptian tombs dating to 960 b.c. The tiny (1/8−inch), yellow−tan seeds are lightly ridged. They are mildly fragrant and have an aromatic flavor akin to a combination of lemon, sage and caraway. Whole coriander seeds are used in pickling and for special drinks, such as mulled wine. Ground seed is useed in many baked good (particularly Scandinavian), curry blends, soups, etc. Both forms are commonly available in supermarkets.

Coriander leaves are also commonly known as cilantro and Chinese parsley.

Fresh coriander leaves have an extremely pungent (some say fetid) odor and flavor that lends itself well to highly seasoned food. Though it's purported to be the world's most widely used herb, many Americans and Europeans find that fresh coriander is definitely an acquired taste. Choose leaves with an even green color and no sign of wilting. Store a bunch of coriander, stems down, in a glass of water with a plastic bag over the leaves. Refrigerate in this manner for up to a week, changing the water every 2 days. Coriander leaves are used widely in the cuisines of India, Mexico, the Orient and the Caribbean.

Coriander

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Cumin

Also called comino , this ancient spice dates back to the Old Testament. Shaped like a caraway seed, cumin is the dried fruit of a plant in the parsley family. Its aromatic, nutty−flavored seeds come in three colors: amber (the most widely available), white and black (both found in Asian markets). White cumin seed is interchangeable with amber, but the black seed has a more complex, peppery flavor. Cumin is available in seed and ground forms. As with all seeds, herbs and spices, it should be stored in a cool, dark place for no more than 6 months.

Cumin is particularly popular in Middle Eastern, Asian and Mediterranean cooking. Among other things, it's used to make curries, chili powders and Kummel Liqueur.

Cumin

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Curry Powder

Widely used in Indian cooking, authentic Indian curry powder is freshly ground each day and can vary

dramatically depending on the region and the cook.

Curry powder is actually a pulverized blend of up to 20

spices, herbs and seeds. Among those most commonly used are cardamom, chiles, cinnamon, cloves coriander, cumin, fennel seed, fenugreek, mace, nutmeg, red and black pepper, poppy and sesame seeds, saffron, tamarind and turmeric (the latter is what gives curried dishes their characteristic yellow color). Commercial curry powder (which bears little resemblance to the freshly ground blends of southern India) comes in two basic styles —

standard, and the hotter of the two, "Madras." Since curry powder quickly loses its pungency, it should be stored, airtight, no longer than 2 months.

Curry Powder

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Dill

Dill is not only a pretty foliage plant; it's fragrance is a "comfort smell" for many people. I barely touch it's feathery leaves and the smell of homemade dill pickles, crisp and savory, rubs off on my hands. At the same time, dill is an herb that is often passed over as just a pickle spice and is not truly appreciated.

Growing Dill

Dill can easily be grown from seed in full sun, and can even tolerate a slightly sandy soil. However, when first planting you should keep the soil moist until established. Do not move your dill; instead plant where you will be growing it. Thin the seedlings to 10 inches apart; they will grow about 3 feet high. Use the seedlings that you pull up; they are tender and delicious! Be sure to let one of the plants remain with it's seeds after the season is finished, so it will reseed itself.

These plants will be much sturdier and hardier. Throughout the summer you can plant dill in 2 week intervals also, to maintain a supply of fresh leaves.

Using Dill

Dill leaf can be clipped and used in cottage cheese, potato salad, cream cheese, tomato soup and salads. You may also sprinkle chopped young dill on broiling lamb, pork chops or steak during the last five minutes of cooking. The seeds that form on dill can be sprinkled on small pieces of toast or crackers with salmon that has been mixed with mayonnaise. Both the seed and leaf can be used in fish sauces.

The fresh leaves can be frozen in small resealable bags and used in dishes. When the leaves are dried, they are referred to as dill weed in recipes. The seeds can be kept in a closed container and used as needed.

Fennel

There are two main types of this aromatic plant, both with pale green, celery like stems and bright green, feathery

foliage. Florence fennel, also called finocchio, is cultivated throughout the Mediterranean and in the United States. It has a broad, bulbous base that's treated like a vegetable. Both the base and stems can be eaten raw in salads or cooked in a variety of methods such as braising, sautéing or in soups. The fragrant, graceful greenery can be used as a garnish or snipped like dill and used for a last−minute flavor enhancer. This type of fennel is often mislabeled "sweet anise," causing those who don't like the flavor of licorice to avoid it. The flavor of fennel, however, is sweeter and more delicate than anise and, when cooked, becomes even lighter and more elusive than in its raw state.

Common fennel is the variety from which the oval, greenish−brown fennel seeds come. The seeds are available whole and ground and are used in both sweet and savory foods, as well as to flavor many liqueurs. As with most seeds, they should be stored in a cool, dark place for no more than 6 months. Though common fennel is bulbless, its stems and greenery are used in the same ways as those of Florence fennel. Fennel is available from fall through spring. Choose clean, crisp bulbs with no sign of browning. Any attached greenery should be a fresh green color.

Refrigerate, tightly wrapped in a plastic bag, up to 5 days. Fennel is rich in vitamin A and contains a fair amount of calcium, phosphorus and potassium.

Fennel

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Ginger

Ginger is one of those indispensable herbs that we often take for granted. I can remember having a jar of ground

ginger in my cupboard for so long that it lost it's flavor! That was before I realized how many things it could be used for.

In the 13th Century the English Royalty loved it so much it became worth it's weight in gold. We are fortunate that we can buy ginger fresh or ground at our grocery stores without having to sell our earthly possessions.

You can grow fresh ginger by planting a ginger root in a 12 inch pot, just below the surface of the dirt. Place the pot in a warm sunny spot, making sure it has good drainage. Water sparingly until the small green shoots appear, and then water well. Ginger loves being misted and fertilized regularly. You will have to bring it inside during the winter, where it will become dormant and die down.

After the plant is well established, in about a year, dig up the roots from the newer sprouts to use; these will be more flavorful.

Roots will keep in the refrigerator for up to three weeks, and you can freeze them if they are wrapped well in plastic.

You can use fresh ginger in recipes that call for dried, but use about half the amount called for.

You can peel ginger root and chop it into very thin pieces for adding to any stir fry recipe. Try adding thin slivers to your poached fruit recipes or compotes.

Grate the ginger root and add to vegetable recipes as you boil or steam them. Of course, we all know that ground ginger is invaluable in holiday recipes!

Mace

This spice tastes and smells like a pungent version of nutmeg, and for a very good reason . . . mace is the bright red membrane that covers the nutmeg seed. After the membrane is removed and dried it becomes a

yellow−orange color. It's sold ground and, less

frequently, whole (in which case it's called a "blade").

Mace is used to flavor all manner of foods, sweet to savory.

Mace

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Marjoram

Early Greeks wove marjoram into funeral wreaths and planted it on graves to symbolize their loved ones'

happiness both in life and beyond. There are many species of this ancient herb, which is a member of the mint family. The most widely available is sweet

marjoram, usually simply called "marjoram." It has oval, inch−long, pale green leaves and a mild, sweet,

oreganolike flavor. In fact, wild marjoram is another name for Oregano. Marjoram is available fresh in some produce markets and supermarkets with large fresh−herb sections. More often, it is found dried in small bottles or cans. There's also a very hardy species called pot marjoram, which has a stronger, slightly bitter flavor. It's found throughout Mediterranean countries but rarely seen in the United States. Marjoram can be used to flavor a variety of foods,

particularly meats (especially lamb and veal) and vegetables. Because marjoram's flavor is so delicate, it's best added toward the end of the cooking time so its essence doesn't completely dissipate.

Marjoram

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Mustard

Any of several species of plant grown for its acrid seeds and leaves, which are called mustard greens. The mustard plant belongs to the same family as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, collards, kale and kohlrabi. Down through the centuries it has been used for culinary as well as medicinal purposes; the most notable example of the latter is mustard's purported efficacy as a curative for the common cold.

The name is said to come from a Roman mixture of crushed mustard seed and MUST (unfermented grape juice), which was called mustum ardens ("burning wine"). Likewise, the French word moutarde ("mustard") comes from a contraction of their moust ("must") and a form of ardent ("hot" or "fiery").

There are two major types of mustard seed — white (or yellow) and brown (or Asian). A third species, the black mustard seed, has been replaced for most purposes by the brown species because the latter can be grown and harvested more economically. White mustard seeds are much larger than the brown variety but a lot less pungent. They're the main ingredient in American−style mustards.

White and brown seeds are blended to make English Mustard. Brown mustard seeds are used for pickling and as a seasoning, and are the main ingredient in European and

Chinese mustards. Mustard seeds are sold whole, ground into powder or processed further into prepared mustard. Powdered mustard is simply finely ground mustard seed. Mustard seeds can be stored for up to a year in a dry, dark place and powdered mustard for about 6 months. Whole seeds are used for pickling, flavoring cooked meats and vegetables and as a source for freshly ground mustard. Powdered mustards and freshly ground seeds are used in sauces, as a seasoning in main dishes and as an ingredient in salad dressings Mustard

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Nutmeg

When Columbus sailed from Spain looking for the East Indies, nutmeg was one of the spices for which he was searching. Native to the Spice Islands, this seed from the nutmeg tree (a tropical evergreen) was extremely popular throughout much of the world from the 15th to the 19th century.When the fruit of the tree is picked, it is split to reveal the nutmeg seed surrounded by a lacy membrane that, when dried and ground, becomes the spice mace.

The hard, egg−shaped nutmeg seed is grayish−brown and about 1 inch long. The flavor and aroma are delicately warm, spicy and sweet. Nutmeg is sold ground or whole.

Whole nutmeg freshly ground with a nutmeg grater or grinder is superior to that which is commercially ground and packaged. Nutmeg is excellent when used in baked goods, milk− or cream−based preparations like custards, white sauces or eggnog and on fruits and vegetables —

particularly potatoes, spinach and squash.

Nutmeg

Oregano

Oregano is an herb everyone is familiar with in some form or another. It's an easy to grow perennial with some controversy surrounding it.

I was told long ago that true oregano has white flowers, but many times we end up with a plant that has pinkish flowers. This is actually wild marjoram.

I have two large oregano plants that are probably not true oregano but sure do work well in all recipes, vinegars and the flowers are wonderful dried and used on wreaths. To be sure of what you are getting talk to someone at your garden center that understands the difference.

Oregano can be used fresh with sautéed zucchini and onions, or is a welcome addition along with cilantro to black beans.

For a simple elegant appetizer, carefully grill thick slices of provolone cheese that have been sprinkled with oregano. When the cheese is warmed and starts to melt spread on crusty fresh bread with a butter knife.

Add oregano to your fresh salsa recipes, or any Mexican dishes as well as Italian recipes.

The leaves can be dried on the stem and crumbled into jars, or frozen in individual bags, then used as fresh.

One oregano plant that is put in full sun, fairly dry soil and harvested frequently will supply all that you need. It does grow quickly and spread, but that will allow you to pot up some oregano for your windowsill and for your friends!

Oregano

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Paprika

Used as a seasoning and garnish for a plethora of savory dishes, paprika is a powder made by grinding aromatic sweet red pepper pods. The pods are quite tough, so several grindings are necessary to produce the proper texture. The flavor of paprika can range from mild to pungent and hot, the color from bright orange−red to deep blood−red. Most commercial paprika comes from Spain, South America, California and Hungary, with the Hungarian variety considered by many to be superior.

Indeed, Hungarian cuisine has long used paprika as a mainstay flavoring rather than simply as a garnish. All supermarkets carry mild paprikas, while ethnic markets must be searched out for the more pungent varieties. As with all herbs and spices, paprika should be stored in a cool, dark place for no more than 6 months.

Paprika

22

Peppercorn

Most cooks today don't appreciate the plentiful and inexpensive supply of a spice that was once so valuable and rare itwas sometimes used as currency. Its merit was so high that many of the European sailing expeditions during the 15th century were undertaken with the main purpose of finding alternate trade routes to the Far East, the primary source of the prized peppercorn and other spices. Pepper in one form or other is used around the world to enhance the

flavor of both savory and sweet dishes. Because it stimulates gastric juices, it delivers a digestive bonus as well. The world's most popular spice is a berry that grows in grapelike clusters on the pepperplant (Piper nigrum), a climbing vine native to India and Indonesia. The berry is processed to produce three basic types of peppercorn — black, white and green. The most common is the black peppercorn, which is picked when the berry is not quite ripe, then dried until it shrivels and the skin turns dark brown to black. It's the strongest flavored of the three — slightly hot with a hint of sweetness. Among the best black peppers are the Tellicherry and the Lampong. The less pungent white peppercorn has been allowed to ripen, after which the skin is removed and the berry is dried. The result is a smaller, smoother−skinned, light−tan berry with a milder flavor. White pepper isused to a great extent for appearance, usually in light−colored sauces or foods where dark specks of black pepper would stand out. The green peppercorn is the soft, underripe berry that's usually preserved in brine. It has a fresh flavor that's less pungent than the berry in its other forms.

Peppercorn

23

Rosemary

Used since 500 b.c., rosemary is native to the

Mediterranean area (where it grows wild) but is now cultivated throughout Europe and the United States.

Early on, this mint−family member was used to cure ailments of the nervous system. Rosemary's silver−green, needle−shaped leaves are highly aromatic and their flavor

hints of both lemon and pine. This herb is available in whole−leaf form (fresh and dried) as well as powdered.

Rosemary Essence is used both to flavor food and to scent cosmetics. Rosemary can be used as a seasoning in a variety of dishes including fruit salads, soups, vegetables, meat (particularly lamb), fish and egg dishes, stuffings and dressings.

Rosemary

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Saffron

It's no wonder that saffron — the yellow−orange stigmas from a small purple crocus (Crocus sativus)— is the world's most expensive spice. Each flower provides only three stigmas, which must be carefully hand−picked and then dried — an extremely labor−intensive process. It takes over 14,000 of these tiny stigmas for each ounce of saffron. Thousands of years ago saffron was used not only to flavor food and beverages but to make medicines and to dye cloth and body oils a deep yellow.Today this pungent, aromatic spice is primarily used to flavor and tint food. Fortunately (because it's so pricey), a little saffron goes a long way. It's integral to hundreds of dishes like Bouillabaisse, Risotto Milanese and

Paella, and flavors many European baked

goods. Saffron is marketed in both powdered form and in threads (the whole stigmas).Powdered saffron loses its flavor more readily and can be easily adulterated with imitations. The threads should be crushed just before using.

Store saffron airtight in a cool, dark place for up to 6 months.

Saffron

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Sage

This native Mediterranean herb has been enjoyed for centuries for both its culinary and medicinal uses. The name comes from a derivative of the Latin salvus , meaning "safe," a reference to the herb's believed healing powers. The narrow, oval, gray−green leaves of this pungent herb are slightly bitter and have a musty mint taste and aroma. There's also a variety

called pineapple sage, which has an intensely sweet pineapple scent. Small bunches of fresh sage are available year−round in many supermarkets. Choose sage by its fresh color and aroma. Refrigerate wrapped in a paper towel and sealed in a plastic bag for up to 4 days. Dried sage comes whole, rubbed (crumbled) and ground. It should be stored in a cool, dark place for no more than 6

months. Sage is commonly used in dishes containing pork, cheese and beans, and in poultry and game

stuffings. Sausage makers also frequently use it to flavor their products.

Sage

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Tarragon

Narrow, pointed,dark green leaves distinguish this perennial aromatic herb known for its distinctive anise like flavor. Tarragon is widely used in classic French cooking for a variety of dishes including chicken, fish and vegetables, as well as many sauces, the best known being Bearnaise. It's also an integral ingredient in various herbal combinations such as Fines Herbes. Tarragon is available fresh in the summer and early fall and year−round in dried and powdered forms. Care should be taken when using tarragon since its assertiveness can easily dominate other flavors. Tarragon vinegar is a popular item in gourmet markets.

Tarragon

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Thyme

Thyme is an essential herb for any herb garden whether you are a beginner or a pro. It's easy to grow and maintain when placed in full sun, with light dry soil. It's a Mediterranean plant so it needs a lot of heat to flourish, but yet it can survive even Zone 5 winters.

Harvest your thyme often, and use it fresh, dried or it can be frozen in ice cubes or in small bags. I use it along with fresh garlic in my meatballs and have been told they are "better than Moms". Add thyme to your meatloaf recipes too. It is a wonderful addition to squash, carrots or dried beans, and can be added to any Pasta Primavera recipe as well.

A lovely tea can be made with 3 parts thyme and 1 part each rosemary and spearmint. Brew in a tightly closed teapot using 1 tsp. tea to 1 cup water.

Let steep for 10 minutes and serve hot.

There are many varieties of Thyme; over 400 have been cataloged over the centuries. For culinary purposes three seem to be the most popular; garden (Thymus vulgaris), lemon (Thymus citriodorus) and caraway−scented (Thymus herba−barona). Try them all if you have room in your herb garden.

Thyme

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Turmeric

Used in cooking since 600 b.c., turmeric is the root of a tropical plant related to ginger. Though native to the Orient, this spice is now also cultivated in India and the Caribbean. It has a bitter, pungent flavor and an intense yellow−orange color. In Biblical times, turmeric was often used to make perfume, a comment on its rather exotic fragrance. Today it's used mainly to add both flavor and color to food. Turmeric is very popular in East Indian cooking and is almost always used in curry preparations. It's also a primary ingredient in mustard and is what gives American−style prepared mustard its bright yellow color. Powdered turmeric is widely available in supermarkets. As with all spices, it should bestored in a cool, dark place for no more than 6 months.

Turmeric

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